Avondale Mills Project

Interviewee: Mira Carmichael

Interviewer: Mary Alice Carmichael

Date: September 4, 1990

[DISC ONE]

MA: I believe it's a Tuesday of 1990. And Mira Carmichael, Mary Alice Carmichael, Katherine Carmichael are in the car. Mira was just saying about the house, what were you saying Mira?

M: I was saying that the house was built from timber that was cut from trees on the place. And-and the logs were hauled by ox team.

MA: Ox team and the house was built in 1887?

M: That's right

MA: Is that correct? It's amazing.

M: '87

MA: '87

[TAPE CUTS OFF]

M: There are sweepers on the north and south border of the main rooms in that house and if I understand right all are made from one tree- each made from one tree but those sweepers are not.

MA: Mira, the sweepers, are those the big beams toward the center of the room or not?

M: No, besides the chimneys in the north and south end of the room. They run from chimney to chimney, I mean from chimney end to chimney end. They come from two front rooms out there with another part in between.

MA: Well, now you told us about something about the house, but tell us what you know about the building of it and what happened to it when it. Why it was rebuilt and what is original and what is-what is unique about it. I know you told me the other day about the living room was finished after the other parts because of the spare, scrap lumber.

M: The very top of the wall was cedar. Well, the ceiling was air dried and it was put it was not put up green. Now, the walls, the inside walls were put up green and I don't understand why the floors didn't have cracks between the walls because I understood the floors were put down green.

M: But, anyhow, I do know that the ceiling timber was air dried, and that Mr. David McCoy, in my mature years, said to me that as a fourteen year old boy he loved it. That ceiling timber, in other words, it was not tongue and groove. It was just routed. And as a fourteen year old boy, did the work and it was hard work for him, and if I understand it right, his story must've been about correct because he should've been, of the stories I heard, fourteen years old in 1887 and that was the year the house was built.

[SHORT PAUSE]

MA: Uh, we saw Wayne Flynn down at Auburn University when Troy graduated on Thursday and he was saying his wife's great -grandfather or great- great-grandfather had built part of that.

M: He built the living room door that I- I'm sure of, I think I quote Annie on that, but I'm quite sure it's true. And I imagine he built the other door too across the hall from that. It's the same kind of door that's in there.

MA: Now what was his name, do you know?

M: His name was George House.

MA: H-O-U-S-E

M: H-O-U-S-E. That's right.

[SHORT PAUSE]

MA: Dr. Wayne Flynn was also saying that, he was talking about the tornados that had come through there and that Dr, I mean Mr. House's, house had been flattened…

M: Yes.

MA: …by a tornado and one of his children had been killed at the school.

M: It was Mr. House's grandchild that was killed at the school.

MA: It was his grandchild.

M: This- -the person who was killed was Mr. Phil House. I think he's got his story-his persons confused in the-in the-at-at the old age because it was-it was Mr. George House who built it and it was Mr. Phil House who was killed in the tornado.

MA: Now you were also saying on-we're coming in from Montgomery, we'd been visiting Odell, and the doctor, and that sort of thing. But you were saying, on the way down from Birmingham to Montgomery while we were talking that in your lifetime you have noticed that the high winds and tornados seem to follow the contours.

M: I-I think that's true because when a tornado came in 1917and blew away Mr. House's house and our house it's almost in the direct east and west lane east and west direction and it did half just about halfway between the House's house and our house and out to the woods and toward through our landlords all the big trees that had been left in the woods out there.

M: But it did no damage to the house. One blew down the barn just north of the house and twisted the barn that was south of the house at the end of the road. The house was not damaged. [SHORT PAUSE] So there was a-was a relation to storms through there as it passed through there, I think a relation to the topography of the land.

MA: Is there anything that you think Don and I would enjoy knowing about the house, and the land, and community…

M: Well, uh…

MA: …being the being the new owners of the old Carmichael farm?

M: Well…

MA: Did you have a special name for your place?

M: No, we don't. I wished there was a name for it and I had to manipulate things from various combinations of initials of the various ones of us in the family and I think they could up with anything but Carmichael. It's never been named. It's just Carmichael's.

MA: If you had a chance, which you do now, would you have any thoughts of any names for it?

[SHORT PAUSE]

M: The only thing that really hits me, I would be copying from somebody else, Serendipity.

MA: Serendipity, well that's….

M: That's the place where the birds sing the sweetest, the sun shines the brightest, the moon shines the clearest, and the stars sparkle the brightest.

MA: [LAUGHS] Uh… [SHORT PAUSE] but can you think of anything we need to better be pleasant to know that we don't know or do indicate what we do know about the house, and the land, and the plantings, and the building itself and the friends in the community or any-any of the stories that would go along with things that we would like to pass on to future generations?

M: The only thing that I would probably put my mind at just right now would be father's practice. We had pretty fruit trees in every fence corner. We had a zigzag rail fence in all the corners of this place. All around the house we had fruit trees at one time or another.

MA: Now tell me your father's name and your mother's name for because I…

M: My father was William Colin Carmichael. C-O-L-I-N.

MA: And that was the one called Uncle Billy?

M: Uncle Billy. And my mother was Lucy Wilson. And the story is that Lucy Wilson came to the Carmichael place to live as a servant girl when she was ten years old. And she lived in the house there as a servant girl and father was then eighteen years older than mother. He would have been twenty-eight. And after mother grew to maturity when mother was eighteen, father and mother were married. So mother's background was surrounded by Carmichael because of the influence after she was ten years old and my father's background, of course, was Carmichael because he was a Carmichael. So that our family, rumor has it, an extra measure of the heritage that came from the Carmichael family for that reason. That's just-just a feeling that I have. I have a feeling you know that place was deeded to father by a quick plan deed by his brothers and sisters.

MA: Yes, it was Dr. John's father is Daniel Munroe Carmichael. Is that right?

M: That's right. And Daniel Munroe married early and the other members of the family except Aunt Pam married reasonably early. There are elderly members of the family still living there in father's house and his Uncle John Carmichael, and I'm not sure about there may have been others. But anyhow Billy stayed to take care of the old folks. His brothers and sisters didn't want the farm so Billy got the farm. Billy did what he could to keep it in as good shape as he could and pass it on- pass it on to his children and I had always felt like, well personally, that that was something of a heritage over which I understood. I never felt like it was mine to use on my own personal preference, in a sense that I would feel that I could run it myself. I don't know what makes me think about that, but I think I must've must've been some impression I got from mother and daddy when I was a little girl. I think there's some-some method and I know father expected us to be stewards or what we received and I never used to emphasize on this that I was better than the family. That's about the only thing I know to say.

MA: Well, did Uncle John that you mentioned, is this the one that was the Latin and the Greek scholar?

M: That's right.

MA: Uh, I only know smatterings of him. I remember Dr. John saying that he could remember when he was a child waiting up almost all night long because Uncle John was coming and he had a new Latin text I believe a reading list or something. I may have my stories mixed.

M: I believe you have. I think it's Robert's son that you are thinking about. See John was John died in 1902. John was born in 1897; you see he was only five years old. So, I think it's Robert's son. Robert was a well it's hard for me to describe what Robert was to be objective about it because he's always been a romantic figure to me. Robert was I think an exceptional man. Robert didn't think so. Father said Robert had an unending capacity for detail but if you ask him what time of day it was it wasn't about 9:15 it was 9:12, or 9:13 or 9:11 or whatever it was. It wasn't about so and so.

MA: Our son Beatty inherited that tendency.

M: [LAUGHS] That is the source of Robert and the Latin and Robert and the Greek. See Robert was a self-taught man with the counsel of a Doctor Slaughter you know the Dr. Slaughter in Birmingham?

MA: Yes, uh huh.

M: His father had an uncle, Dr. Boswell was his name, and he stayed at Uncle Buck's house and lived and taught at a school there. Now I understand they took Robert and his aunts to school.

MA: Now, Uncle Buck was John's was uh Dr. John's father uh….

M: That's right

MA….uh Daniel Monroe….

M: That's right

MA: …just for the sake of the tape.

M: Yeah

MA: Mira, do you know where your father's generation received their education and what gave them the drive and the interest to see that their children….?

M: They didn't-they didn't receive any education.

MA: They hadn't?

M: They lacked education and had no drive for it except for John. That's father's Uncle John and bought this property. I understand that my grandfather, Daniel Monroe's father, was a school teacher and I don't know where I don't know where they got their education, but they had formal education and they believed in formal education. There's a story that Annie tells and I don't know whether I know the details of it but I may have imagined part of it. There was a family of Leach's.

MA: L-E-A-C-H?

M: L-E-A-C-H who were good friends with Sue Compton. They came to Alabama about the same time and maybe on the same train. I'm not sure and they are responsible for the story that the first of the settlers that came to the community looked on the Carmichaels as the—well you would say the intelligentay of the community. That's not the word I'm trying to say and that's not the word they used but they were the…Well, I'm at a loss for words but anyhow I can believe that that's true. I believe you find Dr. John says that in his Uncle John in response to a question the census took up that he was an educated, country gentleman.

MA: Did they did the family-alright, let me go back to Daniel Monroe. What do you know about Daniel Monroe, Daniel Carmichael, and his wife Margaret Monroe and what do you know about her family with any of that have anything to do with the educational process or the desire…

M: No

MA: for excellence?

M: I don't know about that except that I do know that there's a story to the effect that religion came into the Carmichael family through the Monroe's'

MA: Through the Monroe's?

M: That's religion. But I think my grandmother must've been a much more practical person than my grandfather Daniel was.

MA: And this was Margaret Monroe, your grandmother?

M: Uh, huh, yeah.

MA: Now, I don't know anything about her family, her parents. Do you know much about them?

M: I don't know much about them. They lived on what is now the Little Creek, Little Hatchett Creek, which is up in the hills above the schoolhouse and there was Uncle Collin and Uncle William. Father was named Collin and that's where he got his name. Whether there were others or not I don't know. It's my understanding that the Monroes were asked to serve in the Civil War and that-that some of 'em went to the Civil War. The wife of one of 'em was unfaithful during his absence and he never came back. The Monroes moved away from the community long years before my daddy died. I have no idea when and they went to Louisiana to live and they built a town in Louisiana.

MA: Named for them?

M: I wondered if it was named for them. I don't know if it was or not and one of the cousins was Emma Hull.

MA: Is that H-U-L-L?

M: That's right. They came back to Alabama in my childhood days. And Dr. John's sister, Alma, I remember this very well because she brought a granddaughter, Henrietta, back anyhow with her. Alma said Henrietta was the prettiest person she ever saw in her life. They visited for a while. They came to our house but they didn't visit in our house. I remember Henrietta because she had such a beautiful flaxen dress with a very tight bodice. [LAUGHS]

MA: Now uh…

M: There was never any connection with 'em except that I remember my mother making me write to Mrs. Emma but she insisted that I must write on both sides of the paper because Mrs. Emma would not want wastefulness.

MA: [LAUGHS] Now, I understand from Annie I believe that your grandmother or was it your great grandmother, Margaret Monroe who married Daniel Carmichael, was a very stern and mean woman. You think that's where it came from or was she just dealing with circumstances that were almost out of control?

M: That might be true. I remember do you remember my story about the burning of our house when it was burned what Swift told me?

MA: Oh, something about her sharp tongue?

M: Yes. Swift just alarmed us and said. You know grandmother had a sharp tongue and she had scolded a boy a week ago which that you know your grandmother had a sharp tongue. She had a tone of voice which didn't require any further explanation and I didn't ask for any. I got the point that I wanted that surely I didn't have the wrong notion about how the house had been burned.

MA: Well, I want to get back to more about the house, but I also wanted to go back somewhere along the line I believe, well, I do not know Margaret Monroe's parents' names, do you?

M: Uh, it's-uh I know her maiden name was Tedder. T-E-D-D-E-R

MA: Her mother's name was Tedder?

M: She was Nancy Tedder if I remember correctly.

MA: And do you know where her folks might have been from?

M: I don't know but I have an idea it was Indiana, but I couldn't tell you to save my live.

MA: The state of Indiana

M: Uh, huh.

MA: What about her father, what was Mr. Monroe's name, do you know?

M: I don't know.

MA: Don't know that.

M: I think I think the old the old Bibles would have it. I think Mary has one of 'em.

MA: I'll try to check and see. Now, getting back to the house, what about wells and what about the water and what about your childhood in that house? What was it what how did y'all come up and how what association did you have with an older generation other than your parents?

M: You see, I my grandparents were dead long gone before I was born. Other people stood in the place of grandparents to us.

MA: Mm, hmm

M: Swift said to me one time that when one of the children got sick mother always sent for Uncle Billy. See father was an unmarried and until he was thirty-six years old and lived a half a mile from anybody else and I imagine farther than that most other people. I would imagine that a set of circumstances would account for the close relation between Uncle Buck's children and father's children and I cherish it for that reason. I think it's a monument to what my father lived. Without Buck I don't think my father would have managed. In other words, I am today benefitting from the things my father did before he was thirty-five years old with the family that he had and a sense that he stood beside they called him Uncle Buck. There's a history of the relationship between two men,

MA: Between brothers.

M: Yes, especially.

MA: Well, I'm beneficiary also of my great grandparents on my mother's side keeping their managing to keep their children such close friends, we're still close friends.

M: That's great

MA: Uh, well…

M: Well, talking about the wells, the wells that served our house it was a dug well right just outside the back porch and father was afraid to have a well on the same floor with his children so he never would bring it coming up to the floor level. So we had to carry water up the steps because of…

MA: Safety issues

M: That one went dry in the fall but east of the house and about eighty yards, I guess, from the house there were two wells that were dual wells. They were farming wells as well as drinking wells. And we supplemented the wet weather well so we wouldn't have to bring the water some eighty yards or something like that and carry it the house. There were two small wells there. I would say neither of them less than thirty feet. That's a childhood recollection of the distance closest I can remember. I know about where they are but not exactly where they are. And that well we of course we have no refrigeration in my childhood days out there and we put the milk we put the milk in the old well. We poured it out and of course we had a cooler under the cellar where nothing would happen to it and a tub with the handles on the top and once in a while we would get the vat and whatever we had to have to get it into the well.

MA: Winch of some sort?

M: We did it by hand.

I: You did it by hand.

M: By hand. There was a certain technique you used to get that water out of there and once in a while the children would come to the cooler and the well before meals and of course if you wanted to get milk and then water you had to clean out that water.

MA: How would you get it out, Mira?

M: The men, my father, would lean over the well and put a tub down and used a pulley to get it up.

MA: How awful.

M: Oh yes. In the course of that process there was one after the next that if finally there came a day when the well was deep enough that they found another vein of waster. That next vein of water was lime. It wasn't crystal water like we have at the house and like we originally had at the well that open dug well. That old well no longer became useful to us because my father was hoping to wash the fleece. Father made a trough. He took a big tree and hollowed it out and made areas to separate the two ends of it and punched a hole with his auger, his table auger, and made a fleece holder and finally they had a place for washing as long as their well water was good. We would wash down there a lot of the times in my childhood days and there's where he washed the wool from the sheep.

MA: You all had you all kept sheep?

M: Yes, we kept sheep for a long time and we had some old blankets that were woven from some of that wool on the place.

MA: How wonderful. Well, now did you keep other animals?

M: My father had horses and cows and hogs.

MA: But what about things simple things we take for granted such as bathing and bathroom facilities and…?

M: Well, you had an outdoor toilet and you had the tub that you could use in the house and Saturday night baths.

MA: Literally Saturday night baths?

M: Saturday night baths. Of course you washed your feet and you had a wash pan. We had a water shelf as we called it and we had a bucket of water, a metal dipper. Many of our neighbors had wooden dippers but we had a metal dipper. And wash pads, we used those wash pads to wash our hands and face in a routine day by day and we had those things we used to wash our dirty feet going barefoot in the area there.

MA: Well now, when did electricity come to your part…?

M: In the '40s

MA: 19 as late as 1940?

M: Yes

MA: My God. Well now, what about the road situation?

M: Well, the road changed from year to year, I believe.

MA: You mean….

M: The reason that Annie is so concerned about the road and the roads around here was because she remembered how many times that road had been changed across our place. Sometimes it ran that way and sometimes another. The roads were they were rugged and the rain it was bad. There was very little sanding and things to keep the soil around there. It was mighty hard to deal with.

MA: Well now, when you needed to go to town or to church, I know where the church is, you went by horse and buggy or walked?

M: Horse and buggy and foot-walking. We walked to church every week of my life to Sunday School and church. Father bought a surrey in 1902 and we had a two-seated surrey with a bench on the top. We rode to church in that except at times when we had deaths or when somehow the other people didn't go. The children would walk to church as we needed to and we walked to school. There was a school within a mile and a half in my early life.

MA: Now how many students? Was it a one room school?

M: At midway in first grade it was a two teacher school. At the time John Williams and his sister, Eva, Evy as we called her then, taught in it my childhood days at least one year and maybe two. Various other people taught and John's brothers and sisters taught in some of the schools. They taught in some schools in Hatchett Creek and we went over there sometimes. It was two miles to walk there and we walked to school there. Cathy never walked to school. Father let her ride a horse. She was alone and the rest of us went in groups, two or four. There was not another child when Cathy came along. She was alone. So she was allowed to ride the horse. Father made mother a wash shed so that she had a roof over her wash tub and over her head. It was also over the well.

MA: Well now, for such things as washing clothes…

M: Mm hmm…

MA: …where did you get your soaps and things?

M: We made 'em.

MA: You made them.

M: We dripped the lye from the; we saved the hardwood ashes and poured water through them and dripped the lye. We had what you call an ash bucket, tar, hardwood ashes and underneath the ashes you put a layer of straw, straw or pine straw whichever you had is what we used. When the time came

to make that we needed some more soap, you put some of the ashes and took out some lye you add the fat and the scraps of cooking the leftover fat and you put them all together and you got soap.

MA: Life was it was all you could do to just keep going, wasn't it?

M: You just keep going. When you move from one house to another for instance the soap that mother made it wasn't that we had an outhouse, but not far she could get the soap in the water that was in the house a half a mile from us. It's that close by that the dividing line between the whatever you called it hunting soil. The dividing line was that near our house.

MA: You had no…

M: And you had to make soap from it one that you are going to use for…

MA: On the side for whatever…

M: Outside for washing. How did they learn all those things, heaven knows.

MA: I want to ask you something else, too. I want to ask you about the wonderful big walking spinning wheel that I bought from y'all not too long ago, the big one that belonged to Nancy Tenner I believe it was you said. I believe you said you grew up seeing your mother use that and the carding cards also. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

M: I don't know much to tell you. I just took it for granted. Mother used it for us. She took two bolls and used card to spin things that she put into the quilts that she made. She made what you call bats. With the wool that we had she made bolls and spun those bolls into thread and that's how she that's why she used that spinning wheel for. But I'm not sure that she used that spinning wheel. I saw that as the spinning wheel that my grandmother used.

MA: She does

M: And I would think that would be the one that mother used and I think this was the one that Annie found stored from some neighbor. I don't think it was within the family all through the years.

MA: So you don't think this is the one that belonged to Nancy Tedder?

M: Oh yes, I do think it is.

MA: It did belong to Nancy?

M: I think definitely it is that. I have Annie's version of that. I didn't know a whole lot about it but I feel sure that Annie's right about that. It may be the one that mother used. I just have no common knowledge of the events of how that worked.

MA: Well, golly, [LAUGHS] the things that we forget. Now did y'all and if y'all made your own soaps and all of that then the generation before you also did?

M: Yes, yes. It got to the point in my young days that we made what we consumed and what we consumed we made.

MA: Now if you needed how often did y'all go into town to…?

M: Oh, mother didn't go into town but twice a year. My daddy went to town as many times as he needed to and the bulk of the shopping. And of course he'd have to go for farm purposes for fertilizer and tools that he needed and things like that but it was customary for the men to buy the groceries that they needed and he knew it. It was customary for everybody to have a good garden and father was excellent at that and good fruit. We had fruit of the season in the garden. And in the following year, we would sometimes have beans that had been planted in the corn and they were called cornfield beans. And we had peas that were planted in the corn and that mother seemed to take to heart. Mother had a great body and both of them worked the garden at the house. Father worked the garden. Mother was too busy with her work at the house. But mother gathered the vegetables and taught the children to gather the vegetables. You take Dr. John's mother's family; you know their children came along very fast. I think by the time I was six years old, she had five children and twins before the eldest was seven years old I'm pretty sure I'm right. It may be that she was six or about seven, I'm not sure about that. But when Edmund was very small Annabelle asked Amanda if she thought she could go out and gather some beans for Amanda. Amanda wasn't able to get out herself and so she thought she could. The little girl I think she was four years old but she might have been just three went to the farm and pulled out the big beans and left the little ones on the vine and they had beans for supper the end of that day. Whatever time Amanda could get it ready and I guess she did then But as I say, it was nothing unique to our family for things that had to be done on the place they managed to meet them. Of course that meant that you had to kill the hog and make sure it was cured. You had to learn how to cut a ham and when it came time to cure the ham you just had to learn how to do it. Then you had nice baskets of ham to serve on the table. The table looked good.

MA: Uh

M: We had chickens. I learned to kill a chicken and disjoin its head from its neck at the very first joint with one twist of a wrist. I couldn't do it now to save my life…

MA: [LAUGHTER]

M: …but I could do it then.

MA: Where did when the menfolk went into town to get the farming things and the food they need, what sort of things would they get just the staples like salts and flours and sugars?

M: Rice and coffee and flour. You had to mill ground company to make the meal from your corn so we didn't have to buy meal.

MA: And there's a mill on Hatchet Creek?

M: Yes, it's still on Hatchet Creek, but most of the time and there was another mill later close to the schoolhouse and…

MA: Is that Don and I drove around, the last time we were there, we came back through a beautiful little wooded area that had a very sharp creek running alongside the road.

M: Oh, yes that's the McKay place.

MA: And, alright, now tell me; is there anything special to know about that?

M: That's Little Hatchet Creek.

MA: That is Little Hatchet Creek

M: That's Little Hatchet Creek. And it's up that creek where my brothers lived.

MA: Oh it is.

M: Yes.

MA: Did they live on your side of the creek or the other side of you?

M: They lived on the same side of the creek as the mill I think. But I've never actually been shown the area now the Leaches they claim that they lived up there.

MA: They did.

M: Yeah.

MA: It's beautiful up there.

M: Yeah.

MA: Shallow Rock Bed Creek, when I saw it.

M: That's what it amounts to, yes. There's a name for that part between the two houses on that place. I don't know. Incidentally the spring that rises at that it would be interesting in this fact about the land that you bought there's the Williams spring, the Hummingbird spring, Deuce springs that become a cropper house, the Uncle John's spring, the Iron spring and the Poplar spring.

MA: What spring?

M: Poplar

MA: Poplar like in…

M: Poplar because it had trees growing around it. There are that many springs besides the one across the road that's on the same side of the road that your house is on. There's one across the road. Now, all of those are permanent springs on that land that you bought.

MA: Alright, there was one that I didn't get the name. It, I got poplar but it was about the second or third or fourth name.

M: It was the Williams spring, a big spring next door to the house that our next door neighbor lived on that one of the people next to our house used the spring on our house and their family name was Williams.

MA: Alright, is that on the side….

M: That's the William's spring.

MA: Okay, is that the side closest to the Hatchet Creek or away from it?

M: It's towards Hatchett Creek.

MA: Okay

M: But on the right hand side of the road …

MA: Alright,

M: …..they lived right close to it and that is the Williams spring. Now if you go to the back of the place about at the very back of the place almost south of that spring it's the Hummingbird spring and that one is there. Now, there's some small areas that have been drained and there's some ditches leading from them. But all of them coming together down toward the west end of the place and they go in to that creek that you are talking about just before it hits the creek. And that stream has now become the Colin Branch.

MA: C-O-L-I-N

M: C-O-L-I-N. The Colin Branch and I have a feeling that the reason for the name of it is that my father told me one time that Uncle Colin Munroe lived on the land between the Williams spring and the Hummingbird spring across the ditch from the Williams spring side. And could that have been the little creek that flows into Little Hatchet Creek? [SHORT PAUSE] Now the Uncle John's spring….

MA: That was named for your Uncle…

M: That was named after…

MA: ….Great Uncle John.

M: Great Uncle John.

MA: Great Uncle John Carmichael.

M: Now he had a little cottage that was halfway between our house and Uncle Buck's house down on a road what has been a road which is no longer open. And there's a funny story there that some of 'em-some will tell you that Uncle John lived in a house where that it didn't even have steps and he went

through a window. He got in through a window. But the background of that story is that it was just a little one-room building and that when he finished it up, he finished the inside before he made the steps and for the first few days he went in through the window.

MA: [LAUGHTER]

M: Of course he added a couple steps to his house but that spring accommodated his house. It wasn't close to it. It was on the other side of one hill and up another before you would get to that spring but that's where that's located. And that sort of hill, if you stand at our back porch and look to your left, I mean, no to your right, wait to the right, it's to the southwest you'll see that hill and that hill is the one that goes to the Iron spring and the Poplar Spring.

MA: Alright.

M: Altogether all of those ditches that ran from those springs ran together to make the Colin Branch.

MA: When were those ditches dug, do you know?

M: Some of 'em were dug up in my lifetime.

MA: In your lifetime?

M: Yeah, some of 'em; the one from the Hummingbird spring was a big ditch when I was a child. It was a big ditch and had a football deposit. It had a big football growing across it. On the ditch banks there was a beautiful growing Love vine. Have you ever heard of a Love vine?

MA: L-O-V-E

M: L-O-V-E. A yellow, a golden vine that is a parasite that grows off the shrubbery and I always associated that place that football with a Love vine because it grew there. I don't know what made it grow there.

[TAPE CUTS OFF]

[DISC 2]

MA: I am having a tape made with Mira Carmichael and Mary Alice Carmichael on let's see this is Tuesday, September, I believe it must be the third or the fourth, 1990. We're in the car heading from Montgomery back to Birmingham after a trip down to see Mira's doctor and to see Odelle. We pick up from here. Uh, let's see.

M: Father grew watermelon within Cullman County in those days and I think it was a different fellow from what we have now and…

MA: Well, did you have a lot of that land cleared for farming?

M: A good piece a good part of it. There was time that father had as many as five tenants living on the place.

MA: And all of them were farming tenant farmers?

M: All of them were tenant farmers had enough for one man and one mule and sometimes father furnished the animal for them and sometimes a mule and sometimes it was a horse and sometimes the man furnished his own. And it was customary in those days that rent was paid to the owner of the land and portions of the produce from the place. It was father's practice never to require any rent of the fruit trees and the garden place and the watermelon patch, pea patch and that sort of thing. The tenant could get all that he grew of those things.

MA: Well, what sort of rent would he take then? What would he take?

M: Crops, a portion of the cotton crop. If the owner would furnish a certain portion of the fertilizer and the horsepower, the seed, and the land he'd get a third of what he furnished. It the tenet furnished more of them than he could get just a fourth and if there was a provision where he simply grew and he took a huge produce and the boss had his tools, I remember correctly on that occasion he paid a half of what he produced to the owner.

MA: While we were at Odelle's we saw some artwork of an acquaintance of hers…

M: Yeah.

MA: …of some rural scenes with oxen and some uh…

M: Yeah.

MA: …other scenes. And some mention was made of the oxen of that time during the difficult times, do you know anything about that, or did you all ever use oxen?

M: My father never used oxen in my lifetime. There were oxen used by our neighbors and I was told that if it was a log truck loaded that had a coupling pole and a couple of the front wheels and the back wheels together…

MA: Mm, hmm.

M: …. And if a coupling pole stuck out beyond the load and it was pulled by oxen we could not ride the coupling pole. But if it was pulled by horses or mules we were allowed to ride the coupling pole.

MA: What was the rationale behind that Mira, do you know?

M: Well, I don't know. My think now if I think now it would be that they loaded very heavily and that the oxen were loaded to the limit and that the other animals were not loaded to the limit as much.

MA: Let me ask you, at one time Annie-at one time Annie had told me that besides the education you had in a school room, that most of your education, most of your solid education came from the

Webster's unabridged dictionary, the King James version of the Bible, and the Blue back Speller. Is that how you also remember it?

M: Yes, except the Blue back Speller had been replaced when I came to school and I remember the speller but I can't tell you what it was. And the reader became the Baldwin Reader, the Baldwin…

MA: The Baldwin Reader.

M: …when I came along. But there was an older reader that they had, McGuffey's.

MA: McGuffey's Reader.

M: McGuffey's reader was what Mae studied. My first reader was Baldwin.

MA: And at what age was did your children start to school? And did you go all year or part year, what was the situation?

M: Mae started when she was four; I think I was five.

MA: Did you actually start reading at that time? Did you read at that time?

M: Yes, yes. I…

MA: So you actually got several years ahead of our children?

M: Yes, probably so. Uh, but we went to we went to school only a portion of the year, two months in the summer and only five months in the winter. So it was only no more than seven months all the year through and it was two segments.

MA: And the time out, what was that for crops?

M: For crops. Every child that lived on a farm, in that part of the country everyone lived on a farm, we were taught to do things early.

MA: Do you think it was a superior way of doing than it is today?

M: There's a lot to be said for it but I can't say that I think it was superior; but it wasn't all bad. There was an atmosphere in our house of learning to do things. In my own experience thinking about school and not reading my experience was made as they learned the multiplication tables and my hearing together. I have no recollection whatever of learning the multiplication table. I've known the multiplication table ever since I can remember with the exception that I know when I learned nine times seven makes sixty-three. I learned that one thing. I remember when I learned that.

MA: [LAUGHS]

M: I remember that one thing. I don't know if they had said that enough to make it work, to make it stick with me. But, I learned that. I remember the very occasion when I learned it.

MA: Well, where did you do most of your studies? Where did most of the children study the most? At what time of the day?

M: After supper, by the pine knot fire, in front of the fire.

MA: All of you hunkered down around the fireplace?

M: By the fireplace.

MA: And when you had time to play, what sort of things did you play? And you probably have to describe them because we probably wouldn't know them by what you did by names.

M: Well, we'd take a fork and stick two fork and sticks and stick 'em in the ground and maybe if you could get one not only a fork and one with limbs and we'd put a stick across between them and we'd jump. We learned to jump those sticks. We had jumping ropes made out of grape vine. We learned how to jump rope. Uh, we had what we called Tom Walkers.

MA: Tom? T-O-M?

M: Uh, huh. Walker, a walker or something, a stick that had some kind of a shelf on it.

MA: Like a stilt?

M: Stilts, it's the same thing.

MA: Uh, huh

M: That's the same thing but, we called them Tom Walkers and we learned to walk on stilts. And boys learned to wrestle and run and we played ball. We made our balls. We…

MA: You made your balls?

M: We made our balls. We unraveled. We ripped up worn out socks and tied 'em with strings together enough that we made soft balls and we played ball. We made our bats out of anything we could make them out of a piece of board or a piece of shingle. If we couldn't do any better we'd take a part of a limb of a tree.

MA: Mm, hmm

M: We made our dolls out of the pine trees. You'd get a humming pipe with a stem and the growth down on this side and this side and you'd cut the face out of the top and you'd make a face…

MA: Mm, hmm

M: …and you'd make the arms growing out here and made the bottom with the needles and had the idea of using the scissors to cut those needles off even so the arms would stand out. You used the scissors to cut the irregular part of the skirt from the pine needles. We took stones; we picked up

stones and made play houses. We outlined the edge of the rooms of our house and did things like that. And Mae, my sister, learned to do pretty embroider. She did fine…

MA: Now, did your mother teach her embroidery?

M: No, a neighbor. A neighbor friend did it. And mother discovered that my eyes were not right to permit for that sort of thing. So, mother taught me to knit and no other child in the community learned how to knit. I was the only child that could knit but I learned when I was a little girl. And there came a time, as the children came along that the need for more covering my mother and I went to the sewing machine to get it. Mother took a newspaper and cut out squares and she took pieces of scraps of material from the dresses she had made for us and made what we call crazy wheel squares and then we placed them in the sewing machine and sewed them together and then sewed those squares together. Mother used the cotton to make batting for the quilt and she dyed an old sheet to make the bottom for the quilt and she used the crazy wheel pattern up the top to make the top of the quilt and then she and I quilted the quilts.

MA: Now, when she dyed that did she buy dye or did she make dye?

M: She made dye and my recollection is that she used maple.

MA: Maple, now what color would that have given it?

M: It was kind of a sort of a lavender.

MA: Was it from the bark or the leaves?

M: I don't know. I don't remember that.

MA: You don't know.

M: But I'm pretty sure it was… I don't remember the leaves in connection with it at all. So, it makes me think it must've been the bark or the stem that she worked with. And maple may not be what she used; it may have been something else.

MA: Well, did all of you girls learn of one type of hand sewing or another? I guess that was only one kind of sewing there was, wasn't there?

M: Well, you see, Annie wasn't old enough. Annie still wasn't twelve years old when mother died. Annie wasn't old enough to get the training. Mae and I got the training. The younger girls only got what Mae and I were able to give them.

MA: And how old were you when your mother died?

M: She was I was fifteen in July after she died in June.

MA: What a tough life.

M: Well it was. And I lived a long time before it dawned on me that that might have made me into the type of person that I am because I can remember so well sweeping the floor and swearing by everything that I needed that never in the world would I let anybody love me like I loved my mother because I could not stand the idea of anybody else suffering like I suffered.

MA: Bless your heart.

M: And so I'm sure that had a lot to do with why I am the strong person I am today.

MA: Mira, what is your happiest childhood memory and your funniest childhood memory?

M: [LAUGHS] I don't know. I wouldn't know how to say it.

MA: [LAUGHS]

M: One of the things that I loved very much is when Cousin Charlie Williams was teaching at Midway.

MA: Now, Charlie Williams was a cousin?

M: Yes.

MA: Hmm?

M: He was Mary Williams, mother's sister, Mary's son.

MA: Alright.

M: And he was the age of Robert and that shows you where he went…

MA: Okay.

M: And he married fairly young, too. But anyhow before he was married he would come to our house for to spend a few weeks. He boarded with somebody else. Mother would bake peanuts; father grew peanuts and sold them; and we had chestnuts on the ground all throughout in the woods at that time. And father never saved those things except for decorations or something like that. But when cousin Charlie would come mother would put up a biscuit pan full of peanuts in the oven and she took the biscuit out, some of the biscuit out and we would eat supper. And then after supper we would eat peanuts from that were cooked in that pan and we were not allowed to throw the shells in the fireplace. [LAUGHING] We could them in the fire…

MA: [LAUGHS]

M: Mother, she must've trained us to put the shells in the fire…

MA: Uh, huh.

M: …instead of just letting them mess up the fireplace, whatever it is around the fireplace. Anyhow, one of my happiest experiences that I remember and I remember most well is that when cousin Charlie

that when he was that there was it was a special time. And because he was there we could do special things and one of the specials things we were allowed to do is throw our peanut hulls into the fire. I don't have very many hugely exciting childish memories but I was unaware of a great deal around me. I think Mae and Annie saw everything. I don't think anything missed them. They saw it all; but I didn't. I remember one experience I've had. Father was called to jury duty very frequently to Ashland. I say very frequently but it seemed to me it was a mighty lot of times. It might not have been. But anyhow, I remember when Annie was afraid to be left alone and I remember that at one time father had not made any provision for somebody to stay with us. Father made me feel that I was a very great comfort to her and that just blew me past description.

MT: What about your music training because and also I want to ask were most of your playmates your cousins?

M: That's right. I had one friend who was born the same year I was to a tenant who lived on the place and her mother and I were really good friends and her mother made me feel very, very secure. Mrs. Risers was a fine woman and she said everything was going to be alright.

MA: And this was a cousin also, as well as a tenant?

M: No, she was not kin to us.

MA: This was a tenant?

M: This was a tenant. Most of the time we played with the cousins. A lot of the time we worked. After we got big enough to be to do anything much father always had duties that needed to be done.

MA: What were some of your duties because this would be fairly typical, I think, of any child of that era?

M: It was. We were required my father would have me, when he was working with the fertilizer he would have me keep the buckets full that he would pour into the fertilizer distributor so he never had to stop to fill a bucket with a distributor or anything, he had it that I keep up with him but that meant that I had to stay with him. But now, I had one experience as a child. Go back and we're getting away from this and might not get back to it. But, I did have one experience as a child that no other children had. See, I was up at three and Mother was very busy with the baby. I don't know what she was requiring. I didn't pay any attention to it so I trailed along with papa and papa worked. Father plowed and he had his teams. Then when he worked at ditching and clearing land that sort of thing I wasn't allowed to go along because that wasn't alright, but when he was with the plow I could go with him. And I could walk along and hold the plow line in my hand. I don't know if you know what plow lines were in those days or not, but anyhow the animal was hitched to a plow with a line on either side. Well, I would walk along and pull that until I got tired. My father would pick me up and put me on the horse and I would ride until I was fit to walk. On that horse I would sing all day long at that work and I had no sense of music at all. But I want you to sing. Papa does and I wasn't happy. And father, when the time came, I guess I was twelve or thirteen years old, father didn't follow me out to the farm. But I must mention Dr. John's sister was a trained vocalist. She had a great voice.

MA: She I thought she was a pianist.

M: She was.

MA: She was both a….

M: Yes

MA:…pianist and vocalist.

M: And she taught O. C. and Herbert's father, Dr. Josiah. She taught them voice and she taught me voice and I had finally become able to carry a tune before I got done. I could never sing with father because I had no sense of the difference between the pitch in a man's voice and a woman's voice. So, I could never sing with father. So, I could never sing nor participate in father's singing on the place but I loved it and had an absolute sense of timing of all of those things that he sang. And I could time all of those things that he did and…

MA: Do you know where Aunt Bessie got her musical training?

M: Yeah. Her training came from anywhere she went to work. She found a teacher and then she would study bits and pieces. I don't know for sure, she may have had some lessons early in life but she took up training from an accredited piano teacher at Texas, I think, after they went to Texas.

MA: Really?

M: Yes, after she and Gordon had married and I think after she had all of her children. I think it was after the birth of all of her children. She went to Florence to a state boarding school for a year. John's book throws a lot of light on Bessie's life which I never understood. I knew there was something that was wrong with Bessie's life but I didn't know what it was. But anyhow [SHORT PAUSE] I think after she married Gordon and moved to Texas it got better. I don't know how her life was before she went to Texas that part of her married life; but I think after she went to Texas she had a rather good life. [SHORT PAUSE] And I would imagine that she had some training probably in Florence if she found a teacher there. But I don't know whether you realize it or not, but Robert was the same way. His father directed his training some; my father directed some of his training, helped him with it. I remember hearing somebody say that Uncle Buck said that father said to Uncle Buck, probably he's ready for Calculus. I don't know any Calculus, but I can teach it. I think Robert was fifteen years old at that time. And Uncle Buck said to father you can guide him some and he'll know how to know, if you just get him started.

MA: He must've been a genius.

M: I'm not questioning him but that's the only excuse for it I mean the only explanation for his for the things but now Robert when he you know he preached in his early days.

MA: Several of those boys did, didn't they?

M: No, Henry did.

MA: Henry did and Robert did.

M: Henry trained. Robert had no training for it; he studied for it himself and Henry went to seminary and trained. He went to Princeton I believe. I'm pretty sure he did. And before he went to Princeton he may have had some trouble that I'd forgotten about, I don't know. However, he went on to a Presbytery school where he got a full scholarship and he never continued. He never followed up on his original goal. [SHORT PAUSE] But Robert had taught himself after I left but, I imagine father helped him with his math because knew his math through Algebra and Plane Geometry. I don't know if father knew Solid Geometry. I'm not sure about that but…

MA: Mira, did the women in the family, the mothers, have any real influence on the children in the family?

M: Oh, a mother had a tremendous influence on her children.

MA: She did?

M: Oh yes. And she supported Uncle Buck in full with what he was doing. Annie tells a story, I don't know where she got it, that when Robert was a little boy, his father had him out in the patch where he was plowing close to the house and he had him learning something, I forget what it was. And Robert just said he couldn't learn it. He was just he just had a hard time and he told his mother about it. And she and she said, "Well, Robert, I think your father knows what he's doing."

MA: [LAUGHS]

M: "And he thinks you can learn it; I think you can too." And it was it was supported in that way and he finally mastered what he what he was trying to master, but that was as a little boy. I've heard that Uncle Buck said he realized that he had realized that he had in Robert a boy with that towards mental achievement and he encouraged him to do it. I've asked father about "What did Robert do about the farm?" And he always said Robert carried his full load on the farm; he carried a full load. Well, he said he would pick as much cotton as anybody else at the end of the day and weigh everybody's baskets. And, in other words, he did he performed as much as anybody else performed and then he did the extras that somebody had to do for all of 'em. Uncle Robert must've been a natural leader. He must've been a natural how would you say it, a teacher, I guess, maybe, I don't know. Anyhow, the children were told, as I understand it, that anybody that wanted to study in the schoolhouse and subject himself or herself to Uncle Robert's direction might have time to study as Robert did. And Robert chose his time to study when he wasn't needed, intensively needed on the farm and with the result that some of the children did subject themselves to Robert's leadership. And then when Robert went got through got to where he was able to teach, he got he took an examination for a teacher's certificate and he got a teacher's certificate. And he taught and when he went away from home to teach, Robert had one year in school in Goodwater, I suppose I think that's the only one. And when he went away to teach, he was the one who influenced Uncle Buck to move to Chilton County. He was going to establish a school over

there, he and Mr. Rasco were going to establish a school over there. And Uncle Buck would educate Robert's children there. Well, that didn't work out. But he wherever he went he took some of his children, his brothers or sisters with him. And through the years, I can remember well, Joe, and Henry, and Oliver, and Bessie. I can't remember Swift ever being there. I think Swift was teaching by the time he was able, he was getting away from home with his work. But I remember them down as far as Fitchew having lived with Robert at some time or other. Now he lived out on a teacher's salary, not only supporting his own family that was coming along but I mean his own children that were coming along but he had his own brothers and sisters in his home and he shared with them. And that business of sharing with each of us something to reap it's something. Well, of course, it created a problem a feeling of I mean the children for Robert It was a feeling of awe but a more than ordinary relationship between brother and sibling.

MA: Now, did any of that spill over into your family and to his first cousins? Did you do anything like that for you?

M: No, because he went away to college. He went away I think to Princeton I think to study for a doctorate. And almost ready to go to college, and I remember the letter Robert wrote to father he said, "Uncle Bill, I have expected to do for Homer what I have done for my own brothers and sisters, but I'm in no position to do it now because I'm-…" He had a fellowship to enter…

MA: Uh, huh

M: … to Princeton. And he had nothing; Homer couldn't come into it. And he said, "But, I've done what I could. I've written to Dr. Bernville at the University of Alabama and told him that Homer would be coming and make the way easier for Homer. With the result two things happened. Homer went to the University of Alabama and that's where he went to school besides Midway. He had never been to any other school except a country school but the name of the country school was Midway. But the Midway that the Montevallo that the university knew about was a Midway that was an accredited high school.

MA: [LAUGHS]

M: So he was given credit for having finishing an accredited high school, but he had bought the books and studied by himself, the books that he had to pass in order to take an entrance examination to the university. And he never had to take the entrance examination. Their papers were never corrected that he wasn't admitted from an accredited school. So, Robert did for Homer; I expect Robert maybe had something to do with Bama not pursuing that story. When you come in, I had warned you.

[TAPE CUTS OFF]

[END OF INTERVIEW]